



## Investigation of Attitudinal Differences among Individuals of Differing Employment Status

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## ABSTRACT

Using a social identity approach, this study examined attitude differences among individuals with diverse employment status. Results demonstrate that individuals who are direct members of the organization have greater organizational trust and group cohesion than individuals who work within, but not directly employed by, the organization. Implications are discussed.

## PRESS PARAGRAPH

Invisible diversity is characterized by individual differences in thought, values and experiences. This study aims to examine one aspect of invisible diversity, namely employment status. Using a social identity approach this study examines differences in organizational attitudes (organizational commitment, organizational trust and group cohesion) based on individuals' employment status. Results demonstrate that individuals who are direct members of the organization have greater organizational trust and group cohesion than individuals who work within, but are not directly employed by, the organization. Organizational commitment did not differ based on employment status. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Diversity in organizations has become an important area of focus to keep organizations competitive. Diversity is often thought of in terms of surface diversity (visible diversity) and diversity of thought (invisible diversity). Visible diversity can be characterized by individual aspects such as age, gender and race. Invisible diversity is characterized by individual differences in thought, values and experiences. While diversity may be varying in its categorization and context, the actual experiences of individuals due to membership within a minority group and consequences of that membership may be similar for both visible and invisible diversity factors (Findler, Wind, & Mor-Barak, 2007). Much research has been conducted on visible diversity; while research on invisible diversity has not received as much attention. This paper aims to examine one aspect of invisible diversity, namely employment status. Using a social identity approach, incorporating both social identity theory and self-categorization theory, this paper proposes that individuals will form different work attitudes based on their employment status within their organization.

The social identity approach is comprised of two closely related theories; social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Both of these theories posit that an individual's identity is, in part, based on the individual's membership within a particular group. The difference between these theories is that social identity theory helps to explain intergroup processes while self-categorization theory helps to explain intragroup processes. With this major distinction noted a more detailed explanation of the two theories follows.

Social identity theory (SIT) was originally developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) as a social psychology perspective that considers the social structure of group membership (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social identity theory, being grounded in psychology, has focused on the cognitive processes involved in the development of various identities (Hogg et al., 1995). There

are three main assumptions of SIT. First, individuals will strive to establish positive self-esteem. Second, an individual's self identity will be derived, at least in part, from their group membership. Finally, as a combination of the first two assumptions, individuals will strive to differentiate their group of membership from other groups in positive ways in order to enhance their self-esteem (VanDICK, Wagner, Stellmacher, Christ, & Tissington, 2005). The development of identity involves two processes, the knowledge of an individual as being a group member and the evaluation of value that provides meaning to that membership. These two components form the perception of oneness that an individual has with the group, creating an "us" (in-group) and "them" (out-group) dichotomy (Findler et al., 2007). Research has found that individuals will alter cognitions in order to preserve a positive view of their in-group as well as direct more resources toward their in-group than toward the out-group (Worchel, Rothgerber, Day, Hart, & Butemeyer, 1998). The allocation of individual's resources as well as their cognitive appraisals based on their group membership has implications for work attitudes (Van Dick et al., 2005; Worchel et al., 1998). Further, if an individual's identification is unsatisfactory it poses a threat to their self-esteem. These individuals will then attempt to withdraw membership from the group to protect their identity. If this is not physically possible (as often is the case within organizations), psychological withdraw will occur (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001). In short, SIT provides us with a way to understand group behavior from an interpersonal relations perspective, namely identification.

As an extension of SIT, self-categorization theory (SCT) was developed by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell in 1987. Self-categorization theory specifies the processes that occur within groups on identification. SCT also provides an important contribution of considering contextual information for identification. The central tenet of self-categorization

theory is that a group is formed when individuals perceive themselves to be members of the same category. There are three levels of identification that an individual can categorize their identities from (VanDijk et al., 2005). In an attempt to better study the multi-dimensionality of self-identities, Brewer and Gardner (1996) established a framework for identification orientation that distinguishes between the three levels of abstraction: personal, relational, and collective identity. Personal identity exists at the individual level of analysis, that is, one views oneself as an individual among individuals (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Translated into organizational terms, the personal level is when an individual identifies with their personal career (VanDijk et al., 2005). The next level of orientation is relational identity which exists at the interpersonal level. The relational identity is one in which the individual views himself as a member of a specific group as compared to other groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Translated into organizational terms, this level of identification involves subgroups within the organization such as departments or work teams (VanDijk et al., 2005). The final orientation level is collective identity. This level of identity orientation is superordinate; that is the view one holds of oneself at a higher group level, for example- as a member of a political affiliation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Translated into organizational terms the collective identity level can be thought of as the individual's occupational group or the organization as a whole (VanDijk et al., 2005).

The level of identification an individual engages in is determined by category salience, salience is derived from the context of the situation. In short, identification and categorization are mechanisms through which individuals develop their organizational identification (in this case, the term organizational identification is used as a collective of all three levels of identification within an organizational context). Individuals who possess high organizational identification are more likely to perceive the successes and failures of the organization as a reflection of their own

identity, thus they strive for positive outcomes for the organization. The stronger an individuals' organizational identification the more likely they are to develop attitudes and behaviors that are in accordance with their group membership.

Empirical support has been found for the significance of organizational identification on specific job attitudes. Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) found that identification was related to job satisfaction, job involvement and turnover intentions. Van Dick et al. (2005) found that across all occupations, organizational and work-group level identification were significant predictors of job satisfaction.

Within the military, specifically the Military Sealift Command (MSC), civilian and enlisted personnel work side-by-side. Civil Service Mariners (CIVMARs) are federal government employees who work side by side with military personnel. Although both military and CIVMARs serve in comparable job roles and share the same mission, the experiences that each of these groups has may be quite different based on their backgrounds, indoctrinations to the organization, and experiences. While military personnel are integrated into the military system (i.e., they follow the same rules, wear the same uniforms, and are held to the same disciplinary standards) CIVMARs are not integrated into this same system and thus bring an element of diversity to the interactions that occur between these groups. Both military and CIVMAR personnel are deployed on the same ships, are on the same mission for the same amount of time, and conduct comparable tasks while deployed. In addition, the MSC is a military organization, the missions on which these ships serve are military missions, thus the military can be viewed as the organization as a whole. As an extension of this, active-duty military personnel have all experienced a unifying program that indoctrinates them into the military organization (e.g., basic training). CIVMARs do not have this same indoctrination and may be considered out-

group due to their initial lack of formal association with the organization. Additionally, the distinction between military personnel and CIVMARs is made more salient among MSC ships by the use of uniforms. Military personnel maintain the standards of their military role upon the ships by wearing their uniforms for all occasions, while CIVMARs do not have designated uniforms. Worchel et al. (1998) found that the presence of visible team membership (e.g., uniforms) increased members' identification with their in-group and the distinction between in-group and out-group members. Thus due to their lack of military experience and/or training, cues from social interactions with military personnel, and their status as non-members of the organization (military), CIVMARs may be subject to out-group effects of social identification. Thus it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Military personnel will have greater trust in the organization than CIVMARs.

Hypothesis 2: Military personnel will have greater organizational commitment than CIVMARs.

Hypothesis 3: Military personnel will have greater group cohesion than CIVMARs.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants consisted of individuals who are employed by The Military Sealift Command (MSC). MSC is a military owned fleet of ships that conducts specialized missions and delivers supplies for support. There are approximately 9,000 individuals that make up the MSC workforce. The crews and departments on MSC ships are staffed by CIVMAR and military personnel working side-by-side.

Participants completed the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (DEOCS) via paper-and-pencil version as requested by their commander/ director. The sample consisted of 991 participants. There were 276 military and 715 CIVMAR personnel. The majority of the sample was Asian (N=323), White (N=301) or African American (N=237), and male (N= 883).

*Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (DEOCS).* The DEOCS v. 3.3 was used to assess group membership, organizational identification, work group identification, career identification, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and group cohesion. The DEOCS is a survey distributed by the Department of Defense (DoD) that is comprised of three focus areas: Equal Opportunity (EO), Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), and Organizational Effectiveness (OE). All of the following measures were included in this instrument.

*Employment Status.* Employment status is operationalized by categorization of membership in either CIVMAR or military personnel.

*Organizational commitment.* Organizational commitment was assessed using five items answered on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 = *totally agree* and 5 = *totally disagree*. A sample item includes “I am proud to tell others I am part of this organization”. Internal consistency reliability for this scale is moderate ( $\alpha = .72$ ; see Cronbach 1947).

*Group cohesion.* Group cohesion was assessed using four items answered on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 = *totally agree* and 5 = *totally disagree*. A sample item includes “My work group works well together as a team”. Internal consistency reliability for this scale is good ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

*Trust in the Organization.* Trust in the organization was assessed using three items answered on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 = *totally agree* and 5 = *totally disagree*. A sample item includes “The values of this organization reflect the values of its members”. Internal consistency reliability for this scale is good ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Control Variables.* Rank will be used as control variables to account for transactional differences offered by the organization to individuals. A marker item that is Likert format, but



unrelated to the constructs of interest will also be included in order to statistically control for common method variance (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

### Results

Hypotheses 1 through 3 were analyzed using an ANCOVA design to determine if there are group differences in organizational commitment, trust in the organization and group cohesion based on employment status. Results for Hypothesis 1 shows that there is a significant mean difference in trust in the organization between CIVMAR and military employees, such that military employees had greater trust in the organization (after controlling for rank and common method variance),  $F(1,817) = 4.87, p < .05$ . Results for hypothesis 2 show that there is not a significant mean difference in organizational commitment between CIVMAR and military employees,  $p = .73$ . Results for Hypothesis 3 shows that there is a significant mean difference in group cohesion between CIVMAR and military employees, such that military employees had greater group cohesion (after controlling for rank and common method variance),  $F(1,816) = 7.13, p < .01$ . The adjusted means can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1  
*ANCOVA Adjusted Means*

		Adjusted Mean	F
Trust	Military	3.47	4.78*
	CIVMAR	3.09	
Organizational Commitment	Military	3.58	.120
	CIVMAR	3.53	
Group Cohesion	Military	4.14	7.13**
	CIVMAR	3.74	

\* $p < 0.05$

\*\* $p < 0.01$

### Discussion

It is important for all organizations to remain flexible in their staffing and maximize the diversity within their organizations in today's global market. This study aims to examine how

these two vital components operate together. This study offers contributions to understanding how job attitudes are influenced by visible, as well as invisible, diversity factors. Specific to the sample utilized in this study, units that employ CIVMARs may need to recognize and support the diversity offered by these individual's backgrounds and provide mechanisms to integrate them into the existing structure in order to reduce the in-group, out-group distinction and thus increase organization/ work attitudes.

Findings from this study may also generalize to the private sector. Because military and CIVMAR personnel are deployed on the same ships, are on the same mission, remain at sea for the same amount of time, and conduct comparable tasks while deployed, this sample may serve as a reflection of private sector use of contingent employment. In the private sector, contingent employees may be part-time, seasonal or temporary employees who develop out-group identities compared to full-time employees. Contingent employees often work in the same environment, conduct comparable job tasks, and serve the same goals of the organization as full-time employees. Understanding the group dynamics that occur based on "invisible" diversity factors, such as employment type, can help inform research and practice on how job attitudes in contingent employees may be formed. Further, understanding how different levels of identification (organizational, work group and career) impact job attitudes may aid in better utilization of the diversity offered by all types of employees. Finally, findings from this study may help guide on-boarding, socialization and team processes that are utilized by organizations that form the initial social bases from which identities for the formation of attitudes are developed.

This study uses employment category (CIVMAR or military) within a given unit as a measure of group membership. Although this is a viable surrogate to the group membership

construct, it may also be possible that smaller sub-groups of in-group/ out-group dynamics exist within each unit. Given the constraints of anonymity within the current study, examination of these deeper sub-group memberships is not possible. Future research would benefit by isolating and identifying socially defined in-group/ out-groups (e.g., friends) in conjunction with organizationally defined in-group/ out-groups (e.g., work-groups). Further, during the time this study was conducted there were several sea based attacks from pirates which may pose a threat to the validity of the findings. Based on SIT an external threat to a group allows for increased identification among members of the group. Thus, during this time of threat from pirate attacks CIVMAR and military personnel may unify to a greater level. However, this study focuses on differences between groups; thus, significant differences within the sample could be interpreted as conservative tests of group cohesion. A second limitation to this study is the use of a single survey of self-report; in consideration of this, a marker variable was included in the survey in order to assist in statistically controlling for common method variance. The single source type of procedures used in this study allows for the possibility of common method bias to play a role in the results of the study.

Future research may benefit by examining facet levels of work attitudes in conjunction with levels of identification. It may be that individuals identify differently with their organization than they do with their work group, these levels of identification may interact with facets of work attitudes.

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